

[Robert White]

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Robert White, (previously interviewed) has a crony, one 'dinny' Murphy, a town charge, who is 'boarded out' at Mr. White's next door neighbors'. Mr. Murphy has suffered some sort of shock which has impaired the use of his legs, but his mental faculties, in spite of advanced age, are as bright as ever. Time hangs heavy on his hands and he is to be found more often than not at Mr. White's house. Mr. Murphy was formerly employed by the clock company, but is thoroughly familiar, as are most older people in our little town, with the early history of local industry in all its branches. He speaks with a whisp of an old country [brogue?], "second generation" though he is, which is pleasant to the ear, and he is greatly interested when Mr. White explains to him that "this fella is around lookin' for ancient history on the mill."

Mr. Murphy: "Well, now. Bob is your man. You'd oughta be able to tell him, Bob."

Mr. White: "Oh, I give him an earful the last time he was here. Yessir. But I told him my brother Matt was the one. Did you see Matt yet? You get Matt on a Saturday afternoon when he's got lots of time. He'll tell you."

Mr. Murphy: "Well—what's Matt know about it that you don't know? You spint your life over there didn't you? He's there a few years longer, maybe, what does that mean?"

Mr. White: "Well, Matt never left there. He's worked there ever since he was a kid. I went out, one time, got a job in the watch shop."

Mr. Murphy: "Ah, that was the shop, now."

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Mr. White: "Have you found out anything about the betinnin', when the brass business started in this town? I'd like to know myself, I'd like to know somethin' about the days when old Seth Thomas ran it."

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Mr. Murphy: "Bob, you must've heard some of the old timers talk about it. You wint in there whin you were a kid. Now some of thim lads must've worked there in the early days."

Mr. White: "What do you think I am? An old fossil like you? Well, I've heard my father tell stories that he heard, though he came here from the Old Country. He said old Seth Thomas could never get brass to suit him. It took a long time to get here, and he couldn't get it when he wanted it, and it wasn't the quality he wanted when he got it. That's why he started makin' his own. That's the beginnin' of the brass business in this town."

Mr. Murphy: "Tell him about the sled, now."

Mr. White: "Oh, that was nothin'. Just a scrap of a story. Old Seth used to get his brass in New Haven. It was never the kind to suit him, either, wherever he got it. He was very particular about it, used to inspect it and test it all himself, so they say. But my father told me, and he heard it from some of the old timers, that a big sled load of it was comin' through on the Watertown road one winter day and it got out of control and went down in the meadow on that hill just above Bidwell's and turned over.

"The way he heard it, my father said, Old Man Thomas made most of the men turn out of the shop and go over and pick the load up. Yessir. And soon afterwards he began to plan for the mill. That mighta been the straw that broke the camel's back, as they say. Yessir."

Mr. Murphy is greatly taken with this theory.

"I bet you it was, now," he says. "The ould lad was a very high timpered ould divil. Many's the time I've heard that said. It was just the kind of a thing he was likely to do."

Mr. White: "Well, I couldn't say. The story's God's truth, though, my father said. I suppose they talked about it for a month. That sled load of brass, and what old Seth said, and what he did and the like o' that."

Mr. Murphy: "Well, in thim days——Do you remimber whin they paid off in gold pieces? Do you remimber whin the shops did that, Bob?"

Mr. White: "I told you I wasn't as ancient as you are Dinny."

Mr. Murphy: "Listen to him, now. It wasn't so long ago. Some time in the eighties, maybe. I remimber it."

Mr. White: "I can't say I do."

Mr. Murphy: "Sure you do. I recall wan time Charley MacBirney—and you can't say you don't remimber whin he worked in the mill—Charley MacBirney wint down to the barber shop for a haircut, and damned if he didn't give Jake Hentz a gold piece thinkin' it was a fifty cint piece. And neither him nor Jake knew it, until that night, and Jake was countin, up his money and found it. He got thinkin' who 'twas from the mill who came in that day, and the only wan he could think of was Charley.

"Charley'd got all the way home, and sat down and ate and fooled around the woodshed for a while and thin decided to go to bed. And found out the money was gone. He started back down town and met Jake comin' up the hill. And thin they straightened it out. Thin they wint to the Hash House and Charley bought the drinks.

"Another time I remimber old Horton Pease, the druggist, he give a gold piece to some lad in change, thinkin' it was a quarter. And he wint to the lad and miscalled him somethin' turrible, for not 4 givin' it back. The lad looked in his pocket, and there it was. 'I niver knew I had it, but here it is, you old Turk,' he says. 'I got a mind to shove it down your t'roat.'

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Mr. White: "He was a great one, was old Horton Pease."

Mr. Murphy: "'deed he was....And did you tell this lad the wan about the first brass workers bein' smuggled into the country?"

Mr. White: "I believe I mentioned it. It's just a story. They said they put them into barrels, and took them out when the ship was out to sea."

Mr. Murphy: "And what was the reason for that, now?"

Mr. White: "Why, they didn't want 'em to leave the country, I suppose."

Mr. Murphy: "If 'twas like today, they'd be damn glad to got rid of a few."

Mr. White: "But they'd never let 'em in over here. They don't want men these days, Dinny, they want machines. They got more men than ever they need, m'lad. Why, look at the work they turn out these days. And I was talkin' to Dan o'Connell just the other day, that works down to Chase's. He says they're gettin' out twice and three times the work now they did durin' the war. And durin' the war, mind you, they had upwards of four thousand on the payroll. And now, maybe fifteen hundred."

Mr. Murphy: "Think of that, now."

Mr. White: "There's your brass business for you."

Mr. Murphy: "Put that down, young man. Put that in your paper, or your book, or whatever it is. I don't know what it's comin, to, 'deed I don't."